

Awards and Recognition Panel Discussion

This session was held on Wednesday, December 1. The panel consisted of **Jim Makris**, Director, Chemical Emergency Preparedness & Prevention Office, EPA Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response moderated the panel for this session.

Shelley Levitt of OSWER/CEPPO/Chair of EPA's CS Awards Program gave a presentation on the EPA-wide awards workgroup. The workgroup was comprised of representatives from 11 AAs and Regions. The goal of the workgroup was to engage all AAs and Regions in encouraging excellence in customer service by implementing a customer service awards program tailored to individual organizations. The **Employee of the Year Award "S" Award** is a monetary award devoted to exemplary customer service. The workgroup decided that it would attempt to have every AA and region institute a monetary award recognizing a CS Employee of the Year. In June, Tim Fields, OSWER's Assistant Administrator presented Kathy Barton with the first OSWER Employee of the Year Award at the annual honor awards ceremony. This was the only monetary award given at the ceremony.

The Awards workgroup has been discussing the idea of a customer service awards workshop to provide assistance in creating an awards program. The goal would be to get as many AAs and regions to learn about the various existing awards, help any organization or region in **adopting/adapting** them, and to brainstorm new ideas.

Peggy Foster, EPA Region 6 Customer Service Recognition gave a presentation on the **Mystery Customer Award**. This award was designed to recognize staff for updating their voice mail on a daily/weekly basis, and to encourage others to do the same.

BACKGROUND: After numerous complaints about the Region 6 phone system, the Customer Service Council surveyed incoming callers to determine specific problems. The survey indicated that the majority of callers were unhappy with voice mail. Some specific problems identified: Voice Mail messages were too long; no current date given if any at all; couldn't tell if the person was in or not, or the customer did not know who else to call for assistance. Using what the customer asked for, 5 key elements to a good voice mail greeting were identified:

- 1) Your Name

statistics of a good voice mail greeting rose from 27% to 57% of the staff having all 5 elements and 71% of the staff with 4 of the 5. Both internal and external customers have commented positively on the new and improved voice mail greetings. They now feel like they are leaving messages with a responsible person and not just an automated nameless voice.

Barry Goldfarb, EPA Office of Research & Development, spoke about the Quarterly Customer Service Peer Recognition Nomination Program. Which asks the question, “In a Diverse Wide-spread Organization, Can You Say Thank You Enough?”

ORMA's Quarterly Customer Service Peer Recognition Nomination Program

Purpose:

To enable ORMA employees to recognize other employees within the office for delivering quality customer service.

To encourage ORMA employees to integrate good customer service in all aspects of their work and for them to feel empowered in their role as part of the ORMA Customer Service Team.

To recognize and reward recipients for a job well done and to increase self esteem and job satisfaction.

Criteria

- Serve their **external** customers by strengthening public trust in and respect for government by improving the quality of the services we provide.
- Serve their **internal** customers who are EPA employees who ask you for information, services, or materials.

Eligibility: ORMA employees may nominate any ORMA federal employee, with the exception of their own supervisor or a supervisor within their chain of command.

Ceremony is held as part of a quarterly “all hands” meeting and has left all attendees with a good feeling about customer service.

Betty Winter, EPA Region 4, discussed the idea of “Using Customer Input in Employee Recognition Programs”

The Awards Subgroup of the Customer Service Steering Committee (CSSC) surveyed other federal agencies to find out how they used customer input in recognizing outstanding service providers and then developed an options paper on the methods that could be used best by EPA. Group also looked at practices in private industry and ways to adapt those for use in the public sector (within regulatory and budgetary constraints).

OPTIONS FOR COLLECTING CUSTOMER INPUT:

1. Database for collecting “ad hoc” unsolicited customer input to use for recognizing employees.
2. Partnerships with customer groups (having long-term relations with agency) and get their feedback on people/teams providing great service.
3. Mystery Customers – private sector practice could be adapted by management asking repeat customers to serve as “Mystery Customers” for specific period of time
4. Comment Cards at time/point of service – one specific question would be “Who has provided excellent service?”
5. Customer Certificates – private sector practice used by hotels, in particular, where customers have access to certificates to provide to management for recognizing outstanding service. Supervisors could use these as justification for existing awards.

Regular Customer Satisfaction Survey Data – awards for teams could be based on improvement in satisfaction rating or routine surveys could request name of employee providing great service

been an agenda item at these meetings and the Deputy Administrator discussed EPA involvement in customer service with members of the Council.

Administrator/Deputy Administrator have encouraged AAs/RAs to take responsibility for encouraging and promoting customer service within each organization.

Deputy Administrator has encouraged senior managers to approve establishment of Agency-wide honor award for customer service.

Importance of focus on customer service in times of fiscal constraints

In this time of budget restrictions throughout the Agency, it is important to serve our customers in an efficient, timely and productive way.

Importance of need to listen to our customers and REALLY hear them.

Customer Service Activities in AO:

AO CSWG has developed a Customer Service Newsletter, which is intended to keep AO employees informed about all customer service initiatives planned and underway in AO. Our first edition of "The Key" was distributed in October 1999, with future issues to be produced quarterly.

This Awards and Recognition session provided an opportunity to learn about new approaches to giving recognition to EPA employees within our organizations. Why reinvent the wheel when much of the research has been done by others. This session was certainly time well spent by all who attended and benefited from it.